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RESEARCH ARTICLE

MAHATMA GANDHI'S PHILOSOPHY ON NON-VIOLENCE

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Abstract

This paper demonstrates that the political theory of Mahatma Gandhi provides us a novel way to understand and arbitrate the conflict among moral projects. Gandhi offers us a vision of political action that insists on the viability of the search for truth and the implicit possibility of adjudicating among competing claims to truth. His vision also presents a more complex and realistic understanding, than some other contemporary pluralists, of political philosophy and of political life itself. In an increasingly multicultural world, political theory is presented with perhaps it's most vigorous challenge yet. As radically different moral projects confront one another, the problem of competing claims of truth arising from particular views of the human good remains crucial for political philosophy and political action. Recent events have demonstrated that the problem is far from being solved and that its implications are more far-reaching than the domestic politics of industrialized nations. As the problem of violence has also become coterminous with issues of pluralism, many have advocated the banishing of truth claims from politics altogether. Political theorists have struggled to confront this problem through a variety of conceptual lenses. Debates pertaining to the politics of multiculturalism, tolerance, or recognition have all been concerned with the question of pluralism as one of the most urgent facts of political life, in need of both theoretical and practical illumination.

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Truth and non-violence:-

The idea of truth and non-violence is at the core Mahatma Gandhi's political thought. But he himself confesses that non-violence or 'ahimsa' was not his inborn virtue. He simply states: "In the journey searching for truth I find ahimsa. I have only retrieved it, never discovered a new." Actually truth and ahimsa are closely integrated with his philosophy of life. He used to believe that ahimsa lies within the truth and similarly truth is in ahimsa. Once he thought that God is truth but later he observed that truth is God. So, he named his struggle 'Satyagraha'. The Satyagrahi will be the worshipper of non-violence which will be his life and duty.

Meaning:-

Mahatma Gandhi, ahimsa implies uttermost selflessness. It means, if anyone wants to realize himself, i.e., if he wants to search for the truth, he has to behave in such a way that others will think him entirely safe, this is the way

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of ahimsa. He did not consider non-killing alone to be non-violence. To him, non-violence is not a negative concept but a positive sense of love. He talked of loving the wrong-doers, but not the wrong.
He had strongly opposed any sort of submission to wrongs and injustice in an indifferent manner. He thought that the wrong-doers can be resisted only through the severance of all relations with them.

Nature:-
Non-violence never evades violence. On the contrary, it carries on a constant struggle against arrogance and violence. This is why he did not regard the pacifist as non-violent. He considered non-violence to be a very powerful active force. The followers of non-violence would never retreat at the sight of violence. They would rather devote themselves to the task of changing the hearts of perpetrators of violence through self-torture for establishing truth.

According to Gandhi, to move fearlessly into the dreadful jaws of violence is called non-violence. Thus, in Gandhi's concept of non-violence there was no place for timidity or cowardice. He considered violence to be preferable to cowardice. While commenting on this matter in his article entitled 'The Doctrine of the Sword', he says that, given a choice between cowardice and violence, he would prefer violence. But he firmly believed that non-violence was certainly superior to violence and forgiveness was far more mainly than punishment.

Evaluation:-
Though Mahatma Gandhi accorded the principle of 'truth and non-violence' a pivotal position in all his activities all through his life, he realized that the common people of India and even the majority of the contemporary Congress leaders had not accepted non-violence as a 'creed'. For this reason he commented that he had doubt as to how many persons fully believed in the creed of non-violence. But he thought that his movements did not at all depend on non-violent workers as believers in the creed of non-violence. He considered it to be adequate for his purpose if they followed the print principle in practice. Like those days, today also there is acute shortage of person really believing in the creed of non-violence. Consequently, clash of narrow selfish interests, struggles for power, world-wide competition for weapons of mass destruction, struggle for establishing hegemony, etc. have brought the world on the verge of a deep crisis.

In the opinion of the followers of Gandhi, the relevance of the Gandhi concept of truth and non-violence cannot be ignored or denied at all. However, the Marxists think it to be a utopian idea as it is impossible to put the principle in practice.

Non- Violence:-
Compared with protest and noncooperation, nonviolent intervention is a more direct method of nonviolent action. Nonviolent intervention can be used defensively—for example to maintain an institution or independent initiative—or offensively- for example, to drastically forward a nonviolent struggle into the opponent's territory. Intervention is often more immediate and effective than the other two methods, but is also harder to maintain and more taxing to the participants involved.

Gandhi's View of Violence / Nonviolence:-

Gandhi saw violence pejoratively and also identified two forms of violence; Passive and Physical, as we saw earlier. The practice of passive violence is a daily affair, consciously and unconsciously. It is again the fuel that ignites the fire of physical violence. Gandhi understands violence from its Sanskrit root, "himsa", meaning injury. In the midst of hyper violence, Gandhi teaches that the one who possess nonviolence is blessed. Blessed is the man who can perceive the law of ahimsa (nonviolence) in the midst of the raging fire of himsa all around him. We bow in reverence to such a man by his example. The more adverse the circumstance around him, the intenser grows his longing for deliverance from the bondage of flesh which is a vehicle of himsa. Gandhi objects to violence because it perpetuates hatred. When it appears to do 'good', the good is only temporary and cannot do any good in the long run. A true nonviolence activist accepts violence on himself without inflicting it on another. This is heroism, and will be discussed in another section. When Gandhi says that in the course of fighting for human rights, one should accept violence and self-suffering, he does not applaud cowardice. Cowardice for him is "the greatest violence, certainly, far greater than bloodshed and the like that generally go under the name of violence." 4For Gandhi, perpetrators of violence (whom he referred to as criminals), are products of social disintegration. Gandhi feels that violence is not a natural tendency of humans. It is a learned experience. There is need for a perfect weapon to combat violence and this is nonviolence. Gandhi understood nonviolence from its Sanskrit root "Ahimsa". Ahimsa is just translated to mean nonviolence in English, but it implies more than just avoidance of physical violence.

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Ahimsa implies total nonviolence, no physical violence, and no passive violence. Gandhi translates Ahimsa as love. This is explained by Arun Gandhi in an interview thus; "He (Gandhi) said ahimsa means love. Because if you have love towards somebody, and you respect that person, then you are not going to do any harm to that person." 5 For Gandhi, nonviolence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than any weapon of mass destruction. It is superior to brute force. It is a living force of power and no one has been or will ever be able to measure its limits or it's extend. Gandhi's nonviolence is the search for truth. Truth is the most fundamental aspect in Gandhi's Philosophy of nonviolence. His whole life has been "experiments of truth". It was in this course of his pursuit of truth that Gandhi discovered nonviolence, which he further explained in his Autobiography thus "Ahimsa is the basis of the search for truth. I am realizing that this search is vain, unless it is founded on ahimsa as the basis." 6 Truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills. For nonviolence to be strong and effective, it must begin with the mind, without which it will be nonviolence of the weak and cowardly. A coward is a person who lacks courage when facing a dangerous and unpleasant situation and tries to avoid it. A man cannot practice ahimsa and at the same time be a coward. True nonviolence is dissociated from fear. Gandhi feels that possession of arms is not only cowardice but also lack of fearlessness or courage. Gandhi stressed this when he says; "I can imagine a fully armed man to be at heart a coward. Possession of arms implies an element of fear, if not cowardice but true nonviolence is impossibility without the possession of unadulterated fearlessness." 7 In the face of violence and injustice, Gandhi considers violent resistance preferable to cowardly submission. There is hope that a violent man may someday be nonviolent, but there is no room for a coward to develop fearlessness.

As the world's pioneer in nonviolent theory and practice, Gandhi unequivocally stated that nonviolence contained a universal applicability. In his letter to Daniel Oliver in Hammana Lebanon on the 11th of 1937 Gandhi used these words: " I have no message to give except this that there is no deliverance for any people on this earth or for all the people of this earth except through truth and nonviolence in every walk of life without any exceptions."8 In this passage, Gandhi promises "deliverance" through nonviolence for oppressed peoples without exception. Speaking primarily with regards to nonviolence as a libratory philosophy in this passage, Gandhi emphasizes the power of nonviolence to emancipate spiritually and physically. It is a science and of its own can lead one to pure democracy. Gandhi's View of Violence / Nonviolence

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Gandhi's Contribution to the Philosophy of Non-Violence:-

It will be good here to examine what Stanley E. Jones calls "the centre of Gandhi's contribution to the world". All else is marginal compared to it. Satyagraha is the quintessence of Gandhism. Through it, Gandhi introduced a new spirit to the world. It is the greatest of all Gandhi's contribution to the world.Satyagraha is a compound of two Sanskrit nouns satya, meaning truth from 'sat'- 'being' with a suffix 'ya', and agraha, meaning, "firm grasping". Thus Satyagraha literally means devotion to truth, remaining firm on the truth and resisting untruth actively but nonviolently. Since the only way for Gandhi getting to the truth is by nonviolence (love), it follows that Satyagraha implies an unwavering search for the truth using nonviolence. Satyagraha according to Michael Nagler literally means 'clinging to truth,' and that was exactly how Gandhi understood it: "clinging to the truth that we are all one under the skin, that there is no such thing as a 'win/lose' confrontation because all our important interests are really the same, that consciously or not every single person wants unity and peace with every other" Satyagraha means 'truth force' , 'soul force' or as Martin Luther Jr would call it 'love in action.' Satyagraha has often been defined as the philosophy of nonviolent resistance most famously employed by Mahatma Gandhi, in forcing an end to the British domination. Gene Sharp did not hesitate to define Satyagraha simply as "Gandhian Nonviolence. "Today as Nagler would say, when we use the word Satyagraha we sometimes mean that general principle, the fact that love is stronger than hate (and we can learn to use it to overcome hate), and sometimes we mean more specifically active resistance by a repressed group; sometimes, even more specifically, we apply the term to a given movement like Salt Satyagraha etc. It is worthwhile looking at the way Gandhi uses Satyagraha.

Qualities of a Satyagrahi (Non-violence Activist):-

Gandhi was quite aware that there was need to train people who could carry on with his Satyagraha campaigns. He trained them in his "Satyagraha Ashrams". Here are some of the basic qualities of expected of a Satyagrahi. A Satyagraha should have a living faith in God for he is his only Rock.

One must believe in truth and nonviolence as one's creed and therefore have faith in the inherent goodness of human nature. One must live a chaste life and be ready and willing for the sake of one's cause to give up his life and his possessions. One must be free from the use any intoxicant, in order that his reason may be undivided and his mind constant. One must carry out with a willing heart all the rules of discipline as may be laid down from time to time. One should carry out the jail rules unless they are especially dense to hurt his self-respect. A satyagrahi must accept to suffer in order to correct a situation.

In a nutshell, Satyagraha is itself a movement intended to fight social and promote ethical values. It is a whole philosophy of nonviolence. It is undertaken only after all the other peaceful means have proven ineffective. At its heart is nonviolence. An attempt is made to convert, persuade or win over the opponent. It involves applying the forces of both reason and conscience simultaneously, while holding aloft the indisputable truth of his/her position. The Satyagrahi also engages in acts of voluntary suffering. Any violence inflicted by the opponent is accepted without retaliation. The opponent can only become morally bankrupt if violence continues to be inflicted indefinitely.

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Several methods can be applied in a Satyagraha campaign. Stephen Murphy gives primacy to "noncooperation and fasting". Bertrand Russell has this to say about Gandhi's method:

The essence of this method which he (Gandhi) gradually brought to greater and greater perfection consisted in refusal to do things, which the authorities wished to have done, while abstaining from any positive action of an aggressive sort. The method always had in Gandhi's mind a religious aspect. As a rule, this method depended upon moral force for its success.

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